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# COMMUNITY VOICES GROUP

Report to decision makers June 2025

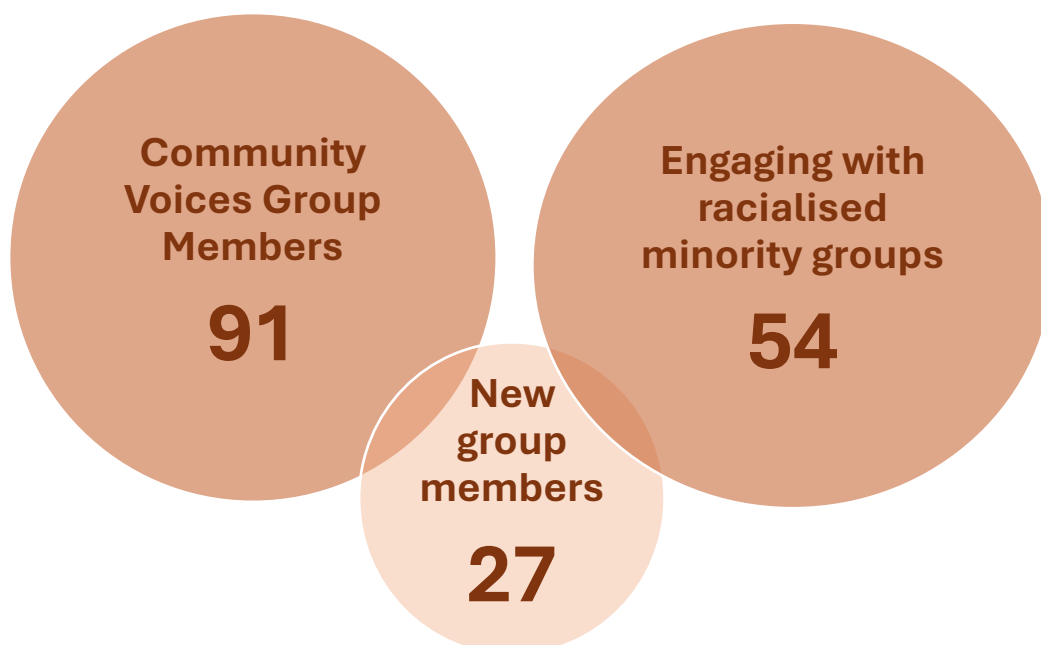


## Background to work

The Community Voices Group takes an innovative approach to ensure that the voices of racialised minority communities can have a direct impact on challenging inequalities. We work to bring commissioners and decision makers together to talk directly with members of communities impacted by issues, providing new insight for commissioners and empowering community members. The Community Voices Group has been delivered by a partnership between Bridging Change, Hangleton and Knoll Project and Sussex Interpreting Services. This partnership changed as of May 2025 to be one with Bridging Change and Sussex Interpreting Services.

Together, we work to produce joint monitoring and evaluation of engagement activity for statutory commissioners. The partners work with diverse communities across the city including in some of the most economically deprived neighbourhoods. 19.5% of the city's population is from Black racialised minority (BRM) communities, 15.1% of households have multiple ethnicities and 4.9% of households have no member who speaks English as their first language. The 2021 Census reports that there is 26% who did not identify as White British, 27% multi-ethnic households, 9.1% English not their first language (13% of which cannot speak English well).

## Community Voices Group Reach





CVG is promoted through WhatsApp, LinkedIn, X and Facebook by partner organisations

## CVG is promoted in the following forums by Bridging Change and Sussex Interpreting Services:

- B&H Refugee and Migrant Forum,
- B&H Social Prescribers Providers Forum
- B&H City Volunteering Partnership,
- Brighton and Hove Educators of Colour Collective
- Community Works CEO Forum
- Sussex Inclusion Health Network
- B&H Racial Harassment Forum
- Sussex Research Engagement Network
- Sanctuary on Sea Migrant Support Group
- Social Prescribing Providers Forum
- Sussex Population Health Group
- Vulnerable Migrants Health Sub-group
- Women's Health Research Network

## Feedback from members



Every year, we hold an in-person celebration and feedback meeting. In 2025, this was at Community Base. The meeting was attended by 26 members and included sharing a meal. It was positive coming together and we collected feedback in small groups for things that are working in CVG and things that need improving. The delivery of our meetings responds and develops according to the feedback from our members.

**“First time I felt heard – powerful, better understanding”**

**“Two-way dialogue – experts on anti-racism”**

**“Creating a community to share experiences”**

**“Following through e.g. questions answered by Council”**

**“Hard for people to come out of home – building trust”**

**“Keep us updated on progress and/or changes even if you don’t feel it is relevant”**

## **Topics discussed in the last two years**

The topics were identified by our members as important to them:

- Mental Health services
- Housing
- Racism in Education
- Maternity services
- Older People’s Health and Wellbeing

## **Achievements**

- CVG has provided a safe space for Black and racialised minority people to speak about the issues that are important to them.
- We have discussed topics identified by our members, bringing relevant commissioners and council leads into direct contact with CVG members to respond to the CVG members’ questions.
- Members feel empowered that they are recognised by commissioners and that their voices are heard.
- Peer support has developed across the meeting and CVG topics are discussed and referred to in the wider community.
- Bridging Change has offered support to CVG members outside of the group.
- Partner organisations have invited and involved CVG members in other events, for example bringing members into contact with funders, academics and other community organisations.

- The CVG meetings are well attended, on average we have 15 attendees per meeting. These are community members and representatives of community organisations.
- Our in-person meetings work well at our last one we had 26 people attend.
- The topics discussed at CVG run in parallel to the work of the partner organisations and therefore have a greater reach.
- We have developed a number of ways that community members can feed into CVG, they include:
  - Attending the meeting
  - Speaking directly to a partner organisation who then feeds into the meeting
  - Completing an anonymous, online survey on the topic we are covering
- Sussex Interpreting Services organise focus groups with linguists who work with a number of language communities and present findings at the meeting. This means we hear the issues specific to those who speak English as a second language.
- SIS has also enabled Service Users with language needs to contribute more directly. Trained Bilingual Community Researchers talk with members of their language community in 1:1 interviews and focus groups empowering them to have a voice despite language and cultural barriers.
- CVG brings NHS Sussex commissioners and Brighton and Hove City Council leads into direct contact with the people they serve, allowing them to network and build relationships and importantly, trust, with marginalised communities.
- In June 2025, we held a co-production workshop in partnership with the Anti-Racism in Education Strategy Team at Brighton and Hove City Council in response to issues that our members raised. This included parents from the Brazilian Portuguese Speaking Community who were able to engage and participate through a Bilingual Community Researcher. We continue to work with the team in developing guidance on the reporting of racist incidents in schools.
- We are working in partnership with Maternity Voices at NHS Sussex to organise an event to collect the voices of BRM women including women from the Arabic, Bengali and Turkish Speaking Communities who will be supported by Bilingual Community Researchers-

## Learning and Challenges

- We must continue to build relationships with commissioners and leads in spite of the challenge we face in navigating internal changes within the NHS and Brighton and Hove City Council e.g. regular re-structures and change of staff.
- We allow time for the extensive behind-the-scenes engagement work that is required to ensure good attendance.
- At CVG, we ask people to share their lived experience and that of their community. This is not an easy thing to do and requires courage and trust. It illustrates the need for CVG. It is important that we ensure people's emotional safety in discussing topics.
- We must continue to work in a reflective way, learning from our mistakes and celebrating our achievements.

## Our ask of you

### Feedback on progress

One of the key challenges with the Community Voices Group is ensuring there are next steps and actions following topic discussions. We have to balance actions with the reality of change being slow. It is, however, very important to our members and the CVG partners, to see progress. Without it, engagement at the CVG forum would be affected. Our chosen way of working is to invite service providers and decisions makers back to the meeting, usually after six months, to give updates on progress on issues raised at the meeting. We ask that this relates to the original questions sent to you when you first attended the meeting, so that the conversation can continue and issues do not disappear. As one of our members said, they would like to see:

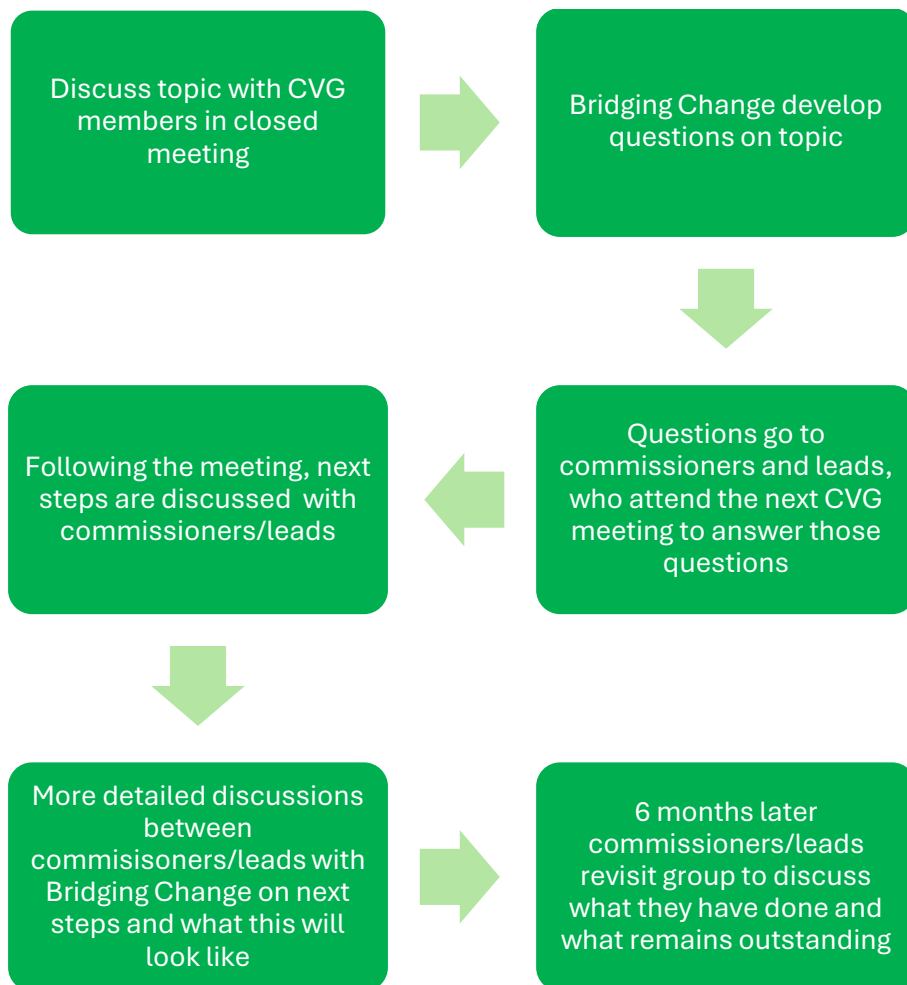
**“More streamlined, specific feedback from commissioners, matched to action taken”**



## Accountability

To ensure that we continue to move forward with topics, we have developed the following accountability pathway, which we have implemented since April 2025.

We are open to discussion as to how best this can work for each of you.



## Moving forward

In summary, at CVG we aim to create a safe space, listen to our members and then work on achievable outcomes from the lived experience they share with us. The sharing of people's experiences is never taken lightly as we understand how hard it can be to talk about, often negative, experiences. We do not want CVG to be a space where we ask people to give of themselves and then see no action. As a new partnership, Bridging Change and Sussex Interpreting Services look forward to working with you all and ask you to sign up to our way of working, which includes maintaining relationships and a feedback loop, in addition to, thoughtful and achievable action.